

# INDEX TO CINEASTE, VOL. XXVI

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the United States at the headquarters of Mobutu before the coup is noted by a tight shot of a diplomatic license plate with an American flag. While Lumumba's actual death at the hands of his African enemies gave the United States what would later be termed plausible deniability, the 1975 release of the Church Committee's investigation into the activities of the CIA revealed that the agency's director Allen Dulles termed Lumumba another Castro. And as with Castro, the CIA formulated plots to kill the Congolese leader, dispatching one agent to Leopoldville with poison that could be placed in Lumumba's toothpaste.

The rage of Africans against the forces of colonization and how the colonizers were often able to divide the Congolese is apparent in the film. And this rage is captured in the film's violence, which is reminiscent of the ideas put forward by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. A regeneration through violence is suggested in the film's opening credits and in its concluding scene. Still photographs of Western colonizers exploiting Africa's resources and brutalizing its people provide a graphic background for the opening credits, while the film concludes with two Europeans dismembering the corpse of Lumumba and burning his remains. As the fire destroys what is left of Lumumba's body, the screen is soon engulfed by the fire, evoking the idea that the flames ignited by Lumumba and other third world patriots will someday burn brightly and lead us into a better world. Yet, whether we are approaching this brave new world in sub-Saharan Africa remains most problematic today. Although Mobutu has been toppled, genocide, political instability, AIDS, and continuing economic exploitation remain the legacies of colonialism.

Westerners and particularly Americans need to better understand how the Cold War and policies of interventionism have antagonized and subjugated many people in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. The life and death of Patrice Lumumba is an important part of this story and deserves to be told. Though well-intentioned, Peck's political film fails to provide this understanding. While viewers of Lumumba are left with a sense of anger and betrayal, this emotional response is divorced from any clear comprehension or explanation of the political and economic motives for Lumumba's murder. Lumumba is portrayed as a martyr in the film, but a martyr to what cause is less than clear.

In a world that seems increasingly driven by emotional responses, an understanding of root causes is essential. Rather than simply waving the flag, we need to consider why so many in the world perceive the United States as a power thwarting political, economic, and cultural independence. Unfortunately, filmmaker Raoul Peck has missed an opportunity to better educate the American public and the West as to these root causes and perceptions.—**Ron Briley**

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Cineaste: *A Cumulative Index*, covering all our issues from 1967 through 2001, will be published early in 2002.

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